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Scholar Fulbright's Strange Logic

Senator J. William Fulbright, D-Ark., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, studied as a Rhodes scholar in England and must have familiarized himself with the British parliamentary system.

If Fulbright had been a member of the House of Commons and had made the same kind of speech as he delivered in the Senate the other day—saying, in effect, that the leader of the majority party had bungled in handling a grave international problem—it would have been regarded either as a call for a “vote of confidence or no confidence” by the people, or the removal of the critic himself from the councils of his party.

But political parties in the United States have no such system of discipline. Fulbright will continue to hold his post as a spokesman of the Democratic party in the Senate on foreign relations.

Fulbright insists that he wasn't exactly blaming President Johnson for what he regards as a blundering policy in intervening with military force in the Dominican Republic. The senator attributes this instead to “faulty advice” given Johnson by his advisers at the time of the crisis. The senator doesn't say to what extent Secretary of State Dean Rusk was at fault and whether he should be removed, but the impression conveyed is that the President of the United States is either a gullible person or not as perceptive as Fulbright himself would have been if he had happened to be President or secretary of state.

Fulbright is considered one of the modern “intellectuals,” but his speech is a little difficult for a “non-intellectual” to understand. He says for instance:

“The question of the degree of Communist influence (in the Dominican Republic) is, therefore, crucial, but it cannot be answered with certainty. The weight of the evidence is that Communists did not participate in planning the revolution—indeed there is some indication that it took them by surprise—but that they very rapidly began to try to take advantage of it and to seize control of it. The evidence does not establish that the Communists at any time actually had control of the revolution. There is little doubt that they had influence within the revolutionary movement but the degree of that influence remains a matter of speculation....

“The point I am making is not — most emphatically not — that there was no Communist participation in the Dominican crisis, but simply that the administration acted on the premise that the revolution was controlled by Communists — a premise which it failed to establish at the time and has not established since....

“Intervention on the basis of Communist participation as distinguished from control of the Dominican revolution was a mistake of panic and timidity which also reflects a grievous misreading of the temper of contemporary Latin American politics.”

Fulbright evidently doesn't believe in fire hoses or fire

apparatus being used when there's a smouldering fire but only when it has burst into flame and a property has already been virtually destroyed. He seems to have forgotten that the American policy in 1949, which assumed that a coalition in China with the Communists would be a recognition of a “social revolution,” wound up with the loss of the mainland to the Communist Chinese. Similar vacillation and hesitancy on the part of the United States lost Cuba to Fidel Castro and the Communists.

Fulbright concedes that a Communist-dominated government might have emerged in the Dominican Republic. He rationalizes, however, that “this might conceivably have happened, but the evidence by no means supports the conclusion that it would have happened.” He declares that “we based our policy on a possibility rather than on anything approaching a likelihood.”

So the Arkansas senator feels that the judgment of President Johnson, Secretary of State Rusk and the American ambassador who was dodging bullets on the spot in Santo Domingo was, so to speak, “faulty.”

Fulbright thinks that the United States shouldn't have landed troops to save American lives or to save Latin America from more of such revolutions but simply should have waited on the sidelines until the Communist mission was actually accomplished. Would it have been another fiasco like the Bay of Pigs? Only Fulbright knows.